

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7162
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 15746

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: JANATA BENEFITS FROM CONGRESS IN-FIGHTING

REF: NEW DELHI 13866

SUMMARY: WE HAVE DETECTED A DISTINCT CHANGE IN THE

POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE SINCE OUR LAST EVALUATION (REFTEL).
THE RULING JANATA PARTY IS MUCH LESS ON THE DEFENSIVE
THAN A MONTH AGO AND PRESENTS AT LEAST THE IMAGE OF
GREATER COHESION. THIS DEVELOPMENT IS MAINLY THE RESULT
OF THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE WITHIN THE CONGRESS
PARTY, WHICH HAS DISTRACTED PUBLIC ATTENTION AWAY FROM
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THE JANATA'S OWN DIFFICULTIES. ALSO, THE FEAR OF
MRS. GAMDHI'S RETURN TO A NATIONAL LEADERSHIP
ROLE HAS TENDED TO CLOSE RANKS AMONG THE JANATA'S
CONSTITUENT PARTS. OTHER FACTORS, SUCH AS THE DIGNIFIED
PROCEEDINGS OF THE SHAH COMMISSION AND THE PM'S RECENT VISIT
TO THE SOVIET UNION, MAY ALSO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE
GOVERNMENT'S ENHANCED AND MORE STATESMAN-LIKE IMAGE.

HOWEVER, DESPITE THESE APPEARANCES OF GREATER UNITY, THE JANATA'S INHERENT DIVISIONS REMAIN AND WILL PERSIST.

FOR THE MOMENT, THE CONGRESS IMBROGLIO APPEARS TO HAVE DIMINISHED THE CHANCES OF A DISSIDENT GROUP BREAKING WITH THE JANATA TO RE-MERGE WITH THE CONGRESS, IF ONLY BECAUSE MRS. GANDHI IS STILL SO PROMINENT IN PARTY AFFAIRS. THE LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE CONTINUES TO BE STALEMATED AND THERE MAY BE NO COMPROMISE POSSIBLE FOR AT LEAST A WEEK IF NOT LONGER. THE VIEW HERE IS THAT MRS. GANDHI SERIOUSLY MISCALCULATED HER POSITION AND OVERPLAYED HER HAND IN LAUNCHING THE REQUISITION DRIVE. JANATA HAS BENEFITTED AS A RESULT. END SUMMARY.

1. IN THE MONTH SINCE OUR LAST EVALUATION OF THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SCENE (REFTEL), WE HAVE DETECTED A DISTINCT CHANGE IN ATMOSPHERE. A MONTH AGO THE JANATA GOVERNMENT APPEARED TO BE ON THE DEFENSIVE: IT WAS SUFFERING FROM WHAT SEEMED TO BE CHRONIC, WELL-PUBLICIZED INTERNAL CONFLICT AND WAS THE TARGET OF INCREASING CRITICISM NOT ONLY FROM THE CONGRESS BUT ALSO FROM MANY SUPPORTERS AND SYMPATHETIC OBSERVERS FOR ITS INACTION ON A BROAD RANGE OF PROBLEMS, PARTICULARLY ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT. FACTIONALISM WITHIN THE FULING PARTY WAS EXACERBATED BY RECRIMINATIONS OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S EMBARRASSING MISHANDLING OF MRS. GANDHI'S ARREST ON OCTOBER 3, AND THERALWERE REPORTEDLY DEMANDS
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FROM SOME SECTIONS OF THE JANATA THAT HOME MINISTER CHARAN SINGH RESIGN FOR HAVING BUNGLED THE CASE.

2. NOW, HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT IS MUCH LESS ON THE DEFENSIVE AND IT PRESENTS AT LEAST THE IMAGE OF GREATER COHESION. THE CURRENT TURMOIL WITHIN THE CONGRESS PARTY HAS SHIFTED THE SPOTLIGHT FROM THE RULING PARTY AND HAS TENDED TO MASK ITS INTERNAL CONFLICTS, THOUGH THESE CONTINUE TO BE SIGNIFICANT. ALSO, WITH POPULAR ATTENTION SO FOCUSED ON THE CONGRESS, AND JANATA ERRORS OF OMISSION AND COMMISSION THUS LESS IN THE PUBLIC EYE, THERE HAS BEEN LESS OCCASION FOR CIRITICISM OF THE JANATA FOR ITS COMPONENTS TO TRADE CHARGES OVER QUESTIONS OF POLICY AND POWER. THE FEELING THAT PARTY AND GOVERNMENT WERE IN A STATE OF DISARRAY HAS BECOME LESS PRONOUNCED.

3. WHY? THE VIEW OF MOST OBSERVERS HERE, WHICH WE SHARE, IS THAT THE JANATA HAS BENEFITTED FROM THE LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE INSIDE THE CONGRESS. THE EFFORT TO "REQUISITION" A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE AICC TO INSTALL MRS. GANDHI AS CONGRESS PRESIDENT HAS DOMINATED THE HEADLINES AND POLITICAL CONVERSATION FOR WEEKS AND HAS

DISTRACTED ATTENTION FROM THE JANATA'S OWN

INTERNAL DISPUTES AND LACK OF FORWARD MOTION. IN
ADDITION, FACED WITH THE PROSPECT THAT THE REQUISITION
MOVE MIGHT SUCCEED IN RESTORING MRS. GANDHI TO
A NATIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLE, JANATA MEMBERS OF ALL
PERSUASIONS HAVE TENDED TO CLOSE RANKS. OPPOSITION
TO MRS. GANDHI AND THE EMERGENCY WAS THE
RAISON D'ETRE FOR THE CREATION OF THE JANATA, AND JANATA
MP'S HAVE SAID THAT ONE OF THE STRONGEST FORCES TO
CEMENT PARTY UNITY IS THE FEAR OF HER RETURN. PUNDITS
HERE OBSERVE THAT IT IS IN THE RULING PARTY'S INTEREST TO
KEEP THE POT BUBBLING INSIDE THE CONGRESS AND THAT THE
WORST MISTAKE THE GOVERNMENT COULD COMMIT WOULD BE TO
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ARREST MRS. GANDHI AGAIN.

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4. IT WOULD BE AN EXAGGERATION, HOWEVER, TO SAY THAT THE CONGRESS' TROUBLES HAVE FORGED GREATER AND MORE DURABLE COHESIVENESS IN THE JANATA. THOUGH LESS APPARENT THAN A MONTH AGO, THE INHERENT DIFFERENCES REMAIN. THEY WILL CONTINUE TO BE A MAJOR ELEMENT IN INDIA'S POLITICAL EQUATION, DESPITE SUCH HOPEFUL SIGNS AS THE AGREEMENT FINALLY HAMMERED OUT BY THE PARTY'S HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON ECONOMIC POLICY ANNOUNCED NOVEMBER 5. (REPORTED SEPARATELY). THE FACT THAT THE PERCEPTION OF MRS. GANDHI AS A THREAT IS A NEGATIVE SPUR TO UNITY LIMITS ITS VALUE AND SUSTAINING POWER. THE THE REQUISITION MOVE LOSING MOMENTUM, THE PERCEPTION OF THE THREAT HAS ALREADY BLURRED.

5. ON-AGAIN OFF-AGAIN SPECULATION THAT DISGRUNTLED
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FACTIONS WITHIN THE JANATA ARE PREPARING TO BOLT THE PARTY AND RE-MERGE WITH THE CONGRESS HAS ALMOST DISAPPEARED IN RECENT WEEKS. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT SUCH A MOVE COULD NOT BE CONTEMPLATED AS LONG AS MRS. GANDHI AND HER DISCREDITED "CAUCUS" OF THE EMERGENCY PERIOD ARE STILL PLAYING A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN CONGRESS AFFAIRS. INDEED, ONE RESULT OF THE REQUISITION MOVE HAS BEEN TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON SUCH "CAUCUS" FIGURES AS SNAJAY, YASHPAL KAPOOR AND R.K. DHAWAN AS THE MOTIVATING FORCE BEHIND MRS. GANDHI'S COMEBACK EFFORTS AND TO REVIVE MEMORIES OF THEIR AUTHORITARIAN ACTIONS DURING THE EMERGENCY.

6. OTHER FACTORS AS WELL HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE IMPROVED PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE JANATA GOVERNMENT. THE SHAH COMMISSION RESUMED ITS INQUIRY INTO THE "EXCESSES" OF THE EMERGENCY ON OCTOBER 26. THE CALM DELIBERATION WITH WHICH JUSTICE SHAH HAS CONDUCTED THE HEARINGS HAS LENT CREDENCE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S CLAIM THAT IT WILL PURSUE THE MISCREANTS IN A JUST, NON-VINDICTIVE MANNER. THE DAILY REVELATIONS BY WITNESSES OF THE HIGH-HANDED ABUSE OF POWER BY THE FORMER PM AND HER ASSOCIATES TEND TO KEEP ALIVE MEMORIES OF THE "DARK DAYS" WHICH EVENTUALLY PRODUCED THE JANATA VICTORY. IN A DIFFERENT VEIN, PRIME MINISTER DESAI'S RECENT VISIT TO THE SOVIET UNION HAS ALSO HELPED THE GOVERNMENT BY DEMONSTRATING ITS APPARENTLY EFFECTIVE STATESMAN-LIKE APPROACH TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS. BY REAFFIRMING INDIA'S TIES WITH THE USSR, DESAI HAS LAID TO REST CONCERNS WITHIN SOME PARTS OF THE JANATA OF A DRASTIC REALIGNMENT OF GOI POLICY AND HAS ALSO DEFLECTED CRITICISM FROM THE CONGRESS THAT INDIA UNDER JANATA WAS ABOUT TO TOTALLY EMBRACE THE

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7. WITHIN THE CONGRESS ITSELF, THE LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE CONTINUES TO PERCOLATE WITH NO RESOLUTION YET IN SIGHT. INDIRA LOYALIST KAMALAPATI TRIPATHI IS STILL SITTING ON THE REQUISITION LETTER AND HAS GIVEN NO INDICATION AS TO WHAT HE WILL DO WITH IT. PRO-INDIRA SUPPORTERS CONTINUE TO PUBLICLY STATE THEIR INTENTION OF FORCING THE ISSUE, WHILE THE BRAHMANANDA REDDY CAMP MAINTAINS THAT IT WILL NOT EVEN NEGOTIATE A COMPROMISE UNLESS THE REQUISITION IS WITHDRAWN. THE DEADLOCK MAY CONTINUE FOR ANOTHER WEEK, IF NOT LONGER.

8. THE PREVAILING VIEW IS THAT MRS. GANDHI SERIOUSLY MISCALCULATED THE MOOD WITHIN THE CONGRESS AND OVERPLAYED HER HAND IN PRESSING HER BID FOR THE TOP PARTY POST AT THIS TIME. OBSERVERS SAY THAT EVERYTHING SHE HAS DONE SINCE HER ARREST BELIED HER EARLIER REPUTATION AS A CUNNING POLITICAL TACTICIAN. HAVING MISJUDGED THE WAVE OF SYMPATHY FOLLOWING HER ARREST AS A GUAGE OF HER SUPPORT AND POPULARITY WITHIN THE CONGRESS, SHE COMPUDED HER PROBLEM BY BITTERLY ATTACKING THE PRESENT PARTY LEADERSHIP AT THE OCTOBER 15 AICC MEETING. PERHAPS THE GRAVEST ERROR WAS THAT SHE ALLOWED HER SUPPORTERS TO SO OPENLY AGITATE IN HER FAVOR AT THE AICC AND IN PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS. AS THE CONGRESS CONTINUES TO WASH ITS DIRTY LINEN IN PUBLIC, THE JANATA WATCHES FROM THE SIDELINES AS A VERY INTERESTED SPECTATOR.
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